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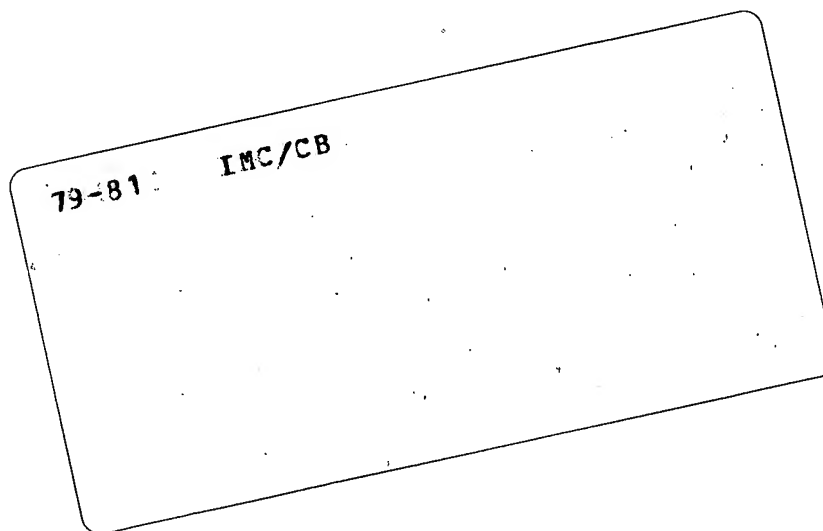
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Afghanistan Situation Report

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26 February 1985

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TOP SECRET

25X1

AFGHANISTAN SITUATION REPORT

CONTENTS

[Redacted]

1

25X1

LACK OF STRONG SUCCESSOR TO ZABIULLAH

1

Khalil Khan, named to succeed recently killed Jamiat leader Zabiullah Khan, will be challenged by local Jamiat commanders and rival insurgent groups. [Redacted]

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CORRUPTION AMONG SOVIET ADVISERS

2

Extortions from Afghans by Soviet advisers is increasing as Soviets become more involved in the daily functions of the Afghan Government. [Redacted]

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CONCERN ABOUT AFGHAN REFUGEES IN BALUCHISTAN

2

Pakistani authorities are designating more security forces to Afghan refugee camps in Baluchistan. [Redacted]

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AFGHAN YOUTHS SENT TO USSR

2

More than 700 Afghan youths left for schooling in the USSR in late 1984, but many parents are now requesting the return of their children. [Redacted]

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IN BRIEF

3

26 February 1985
NESA M 85-10044CX
SOVA M 85-10035CX

25X1

TOP SECRET

25X1

PERSPECTIVE

MIXED PROSPECTS FOR SOVIET ELITE UNITS IN AFGHANISTAN

4

The Soviets are relying on elite units--airborne troops, special purpose forces (Spetsnaz), and reconnaissance detachments--for combat operations in Afghanistan. Despite the small increases in the number of elite troops and some indications of improved unit tactics, the effectiveness of these forces is limited by poor intelligence, poor security, the desire to reduce casualties, and too rigid tactics.

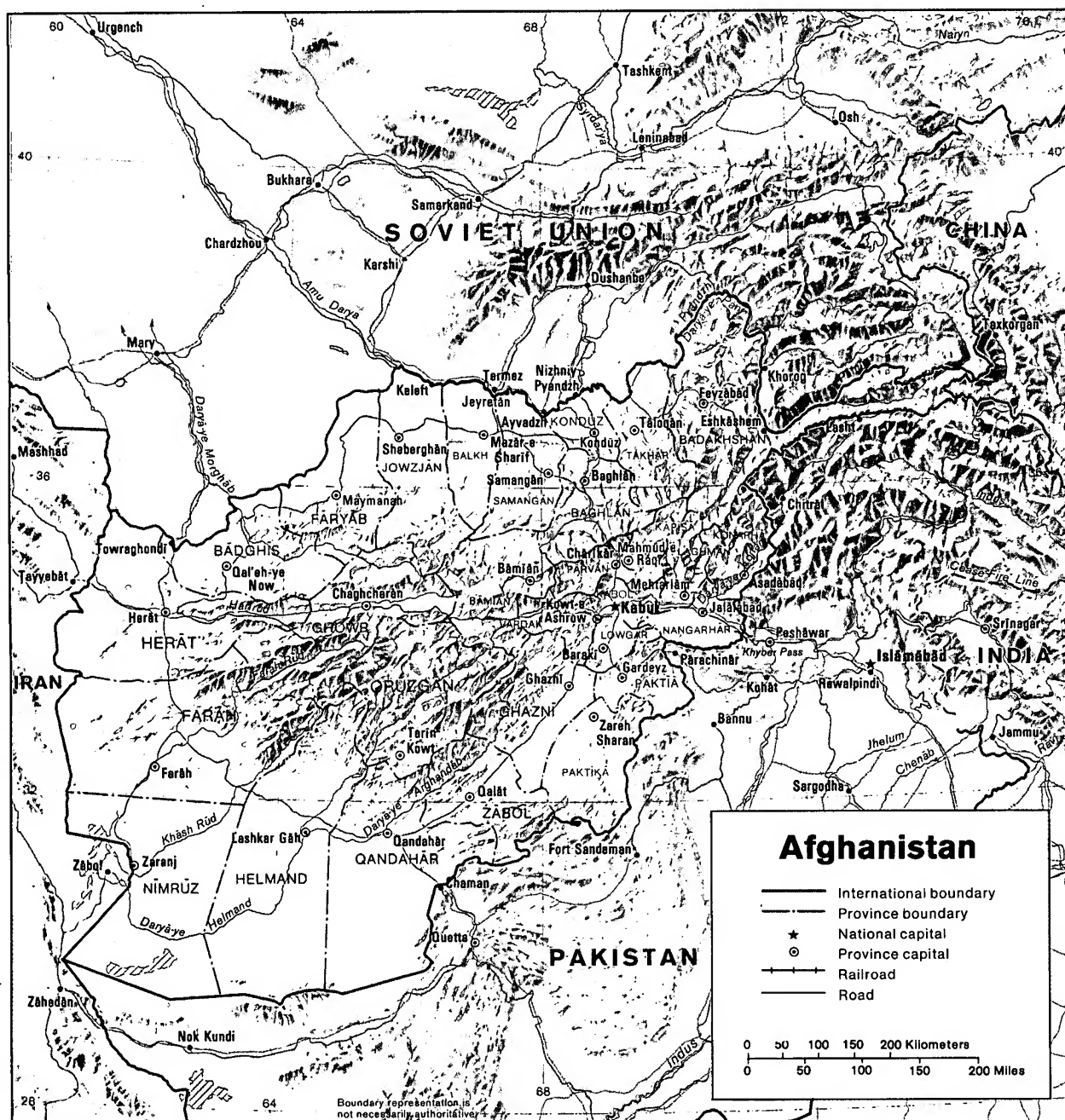
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26 February 1985
NESA M 85-10044CX
SOVA M 85-10035CX

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26 February 1985
NESA M 85-10044CX
SOVA M 85-10035CX

TOP SECRET

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LACK OF STRONG SUCCESSOR TO ZABIULLAH

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The death of Zabiullah Khan in December 1984 produced a temporary power vacuum for the Jamiat-i-Islami insurgents in Balkh Province.

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Some Harakat-i-Inqilab members--accused of Zabiullah's death--have been eager to dissociate themselves from Zabiullah's attackers; others have sought to blame Zabiullah for provoking the attack by killing potential rival commanders.

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Comment: The delay in naming a successor to Zabiullah indicates Rabbani's lack of confidence that his appointment would be acceptable to commanders. Similarly, the implication of Harakat in Zabiullah's death and the reaction of Harakat members to the reports indicate Harakat leader Nabi's lack of control over his insurgent bands. Khalil probably will face opposition from local Jamiat commanders as Zabiullah's successor, and fighting between Jamiat and Harakat groups in Balkh Province is likely to take precedence over attacks on the Soviets and Afghan regime this spring.

25X1

26 February 1985
NESA M 85-10044CX
SOVA M 85-10035CX

25X1

TOP SECRET

25X1

CORRUPTION AMONG SOVIET ADVISERS

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Corruption among Soviet civilian advisers is increasing in Afghanistan. Some advisers reportedly extort valuables from Afghan civilian subordinates by threatening them with conscription into the Army, interrogation or firing. Soviet military advisers also order their Afghan subordinates to collect goods when searching Afghan homes.

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Comment: Corruption, endemic among Soviet advisers in Afghanistan, probably is increasing, in part, because Soviets are increasingly involved in the daily functions of the Afghan Government. Many Afghan officials with knowledge of Western technology are being dismissed and replaced by Soviets, and there is a continued outflow of educated civilians from Afghanistan. Soviet soldiers and officers most often seek cannabis products, cigarettes, and Western clothing from their Afghan counterparts.

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CONCERN ABOUT AFGHAN REFUGEES IN BALUCHISTAN

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Pakistani authorities in Baluchistan agreed last November that five additional paramilitary Frontier Corps battalions (about 3,500 men) would be needed to improve control of Afghan refugees in the Quetta area. The authorities want additional paramilitary forces because of an increase in refugee crimes and because 250,000 refugees in urban areas may be shifted to refugee camps. The authorities decided, however, that they can only spare one battalion from the rest of Baluchistan and that they may not be able to raise a second because of lack of funds.

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Comment: Until now, the 500,000 refugees in Baluchistan have not been a major problem for Pakistani authorities. The Pakistanis appear increasingly worried, however, that the largely Pushtun refugees will cause difficulties along the border or settle in urban areas or the interior of the province and clash with the indigenous Baluch population.

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AFGHAN YOUTHS SENT TO THE USSR

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During the last four months of 1984, the Afghan regime sent 743 boys to the USSR for schooling. many are in poor health and that some parents are seeking their return. Most of the boys are from the Kabul

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25X1

26 February 1985
 NESA M 85-10044CX
 SOVA M 85-10035CX

25X1

TOP SECRET

25X1

area and Paktia and Nangarhar Provinces. Hundreds of others attend Young Pioneer camps in the USSR [REDACTED]

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Comment: Afghan parental reluctance--even among party members--to cooperate in the Soviet and regime education effort has been a long-standing problem. Moreover, many students return from the USSR antagonistic toward the Soviet system. Even for those who are successfully indoctrinated, lack of security outside the Kabul area may prevent the regime from placing them in appropriate positions. [REDACTED]

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IN BRIEF

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-- Red Cross hospital statistics reflect heavy and continuous fighting this winter near the Pakistani-Afghan border. Typical winter occupancy rate at the surgical hospital had been 78 percent, but this year it has been running 102 percent, according to Red Cross officials. The death rate also has risen dramatically because many patients are more severely wounded.

-- The Afghan Consul in Bombay may have defected recently, according to US Embassy reports. The official is reportedly the brother of Politburo member Nur Ahmad Nur.

25X1

26 February 1985
NESA M 85-10044CX
SOVA M 85-10035CX

25X1

TOP SECRET

25X1

**PERSPECTIVE
MIXED PROSPECTS FOR SOVIET ELITE UNITS IN AFGHANISTAN**

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The Soviets are relying more on a variety of elite units--airborne troops, special purpose forces (Spetsnaz), and reconnaissance detachments--for combat operations in Afghanistan. Compared to regular units, elite forces are more mobile and have superior quality troops and leadership. [REDACTED]

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Despite recent small increases in the number of elite troops and some indications of improved unit tactics, however, we believe these forces are still not being used to best effect. Poor intelligence, the desire to reduce casualties, poor security, and rigid tactics have all been obstacles to improved performance. Major improvements in effectiveness would probably require changes in the basic Soviet approach to the war. [REDACTED]

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25X1

26 February 1985
NESA M 85-10044CX
SOVA M 85-10035CX

25X1

TOP SECRET

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Comparison of Elite Units

There is little to suggest major differences in the types of operations conducted by airborne, reconnaissance, and Spetsnaz units. All have participated in heliborne assaults, raids, and ambushes as well as support for conventional ground-force operations. Although these units normally have different missions, it appears that combat experience in Afghanistan has caused them to arrive at roughly similar approaches to the counterinsurgency.

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25X1

26 February 1985
NESA M 85-10044CX
SOVA M 85-10035CX

25X1

TOP SECRET

25X1

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The size of the 11,000 man airborne contingent in Afghanistan has not changed since 1980. In the spring of 1984 two battalions of the 104th GAD at Kirovabad were brought temporarily to Kabul as an operational reserve for the Panjsher VII offensive, but they were not used in combat and returned to the USSR in June. In 1983 then First Deputy Minister of Defense Sokolov recommended deploying additional airborne troops; and now that he is Defense Minister there may be more temporary deployments or permanent stationing of additional units.

Special Purpose Forces (Spetsnaz): The Soviets have four Spetsnaz units in Afghanistan that are officially designated Independent Motorized Rifle Battalions. [REDACTED]

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These units differ in personnel and organization from typical Spetsnaz units associated with Soviet ground-forces in the western USSR and Group of Soviet Forces Germany. The primary mission of Spetsnaz appears to be crisis and wartime reconnaissance collection behind NATO lines, carried out by small teams of 5-15 men. In peacetime typical Spetsnaz are

26 February 1985
NESA M 85-10044CX
SOVA M 85-10035CX

25X1

TOP SECRET

25X1

subordinate to the GRU; the total peacetime complement is roughly 10,000 men.

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Reconnaissance Units: Each of the three Motorized Rifle Divisions in Afghanistan has a 370-man reconnaissance battalion, and most motorized rifle regiments have reconnaissance companies. In conventional combat reconnaissance battalions are designed to conduct patrols--out to roughly 50 km from the front-lines in a NATO war--to collect information on enemy tactical deployments. They are equipped for rapid movement and light combat.

In Afghanistan reconnaissance units support convoy security and sweep operations, as well as conduct independent ambushes and heliborne assaults.

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elements of the reconnaissance company of the 191st Independent Motorized Rifle Regiment at Ghazni participated in all convoy and combat operations, probably as scouts or to secure landing zones. The company

25X1

26 February 1985
NESA M 85-10044CX
SOVA M 85-10035CX

25X1

TOP SECRET

25X1

was also designated quick-reaction force in the event of an attack on the regimental compound. [REDACTED]

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Conclusion

The elite units clearly outperform conventional Soviet troops. They are better-suited to the mountainous terrain, have more readily adopted new tactics, and have superior quality troops and leadership. The effectiveness of Soviet elite forces has been hampered, however, by a number of factors:

- **Limited Numbers:** Elite forces are inherently difficult to assemble and maintain, and are often resisted by military organizations that resent their special status or see their main purpose to be support for conventional combat operations. The two airborne divisions in Afghanistan already represent a large fraction of the seven divisions available, and the number of Spetsnaz troops is similarly limited. Further diversion of these resources to Afghanistan may be viewed as dangerously reducing capabilities in more important Soviet military regions opposite NATO and China.

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- **Political Constraints:** The Soviets, for political reasons, prefer to operate jointly with Afghan troops who almost invariably turn in a poor performance. Joint operations are also less secure; information is frequently leaked to the insurgents.

26 February 1985
NESA M 85-10044CX
SOVA M 85-10035CX

25X1

TOP SECRET

25X1

-- Concern Over Casualties: Soviet commanders have been instructed to minimize casualties, leading to cautious tactics and heavy reliance on air and artillery strikes. Prior air and artillery attacks often alert the insurgents to impending operations.

-- Rigid Approach to Operations: Soviet forces are designed primarily to fight a war against NATO, and most troops going to Afghanistan do not receive training appropriate to a counterinsurgency war. In conjunction with directives to reduce casualties, stereotyped and repetitive operations develop too slowly to engage highly mobile insurgents, and fail to make effective use of superior Soviet firepower. Even the more flexible elite units are hampered when forced to operate jointly with regular troops. In addition Soviet ground troops, including elite units, are composed of relatively short-term conscripts so that lessons learned in country are rapidly lost. Major parts of the airborne forces, for instance, are rotated twice a year.

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While there is room for improvement in particular areas of tactics and discipline, substantial improvements in elite force effectiveness would probably require the changes in Soviet approach to the war, allowing for more aggressive, independent operations. Even so, elite units alone cannot generally gain decisive results. Their most effective role is in conjunction with conventional forces, where their mobility and fighting power can be decisive in locating and pinning down insurgents long enough for superior Soviet firepower to be brought to bear. Success in these operations, however, will require improvements by regular forces more than by elite troops. While aggressive patrols and ambushes are useful to disrupt insurgent supply-lines and bases, and prevent insurgents from massing for attacks on convoys and cities, the small numbers of elite troops, the country-wide scope of the war, and the long borders with Pakistan and Iran limit the overall effectiveness of such operations. Though the Soviets could increase their elite forces somewhat by moving in parts of another airborne division, or forming additional Spetsnaz battalions, large increases are unlikely in the near future given the scarcity of such troops and the long periods needed to develop and train them.

25X1

26 February 1985
NESA M 85-10044CX
SOVA M 85-10035CX

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